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ATG Interviews Richard Charkin

CEO Macmillan Publishers, Ltd.

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Please Note: British spelling has been retained. — KS

ATG: *Could you explain the structure of the Macmillan group of companies? Macmillan was bought by the von Holtzbrinck family in 1995. Has being part of a German media group changed the company culture in any way?*

RC: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd. is a wholly owned subsidiary of Verlagsgruppe Georg von Holtzbrinck, a family-owned and controlled media company headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany. Macmillan Publishing and its associate companies in the USA, including St. Martin's Press, Farrar Straus, Henry Holt, Bedford Freeman Worth represent the English language network of the group. Within the UK-managed businesses the better-known brands include Pan, Picador, Grove, Nature and Palgrave in addition to the Macmillan name itself. The Holtzbrinck group has a consistent policy of strong decentralisation which is also a tradition of the Macmillan group — and hence our culture has changed little since the acquisition.

ATG: *You became CEO of Macmillan in 1997. Have you always worked in publishing? What do you enjoy about being the CEO of such a large publishing company? How do you make best use of your time?*

RC: I left Trinity College Cambridge at the age of 22 having studied Natural Sciences and managed to land a job as the science editor for a small family company called George Harrap — famous for its French dictionary range. Here, largely as a result of the company's incomplete management structures and control, I was forced to learn and apply the mechanics of book publishing — from production, through rights, publicity, marketing, etc. Two years on I took a job to work with the infamous Robert Maxwell at Pergamon Press in Oxford where I learned many things — some with profit, some with regret. After a year — the maximum recommended time to work for Maxwell — I moved to Oxford University Press as medical editor and stayed there for 13 years ending up as the MD of the UK businesses and leaving when I wasn't offered the CEO position. At that point I joined Reed International working with Paul Hamlyn setting up a mass market paperback list. I became head of Reed International Books whose

brands included Heinemann, Mitchell Beazley, Methuen, George Philip, Conran Octopus, Rigby, Butterworth Heinemann, Ginn etc. After a fascinating eight years I joined Vitek Tracz at the Current Science Group as CEO. Here, I was involved with publishing the Current Opinion range of titles as well as early Web products such as BioMedNet and ChemWeb. We sold the Web business and the Biology Current Opinion titles to Elsevier Science at 2:00am on a Friday in 1997 at the Frankfurt Book Fair and I agreed to accept the CEO position at Macmillan at 10:00am the same day — it was a close-run thing.

The aspect of my job that I enjoy most is running the Graduate Recruitment Scheme. This involves identifying and helping new talent.

I make best use of my time by moving around London on foot rather than by taxi, tube or bus. It is quicker and healthier and allows me to make phone calls and send e-mails "on the hoof." Typically I do Asia and Australasia on my way to work and the US, Canada and Latin America on my way home.

ATG: *Publishers have had varying attitudes about the Web. Some have been quick to embrace the online world; others have seen it as a threat to their existing business. What is your view?*

RC: In my experience no new technology has proven to be as threatening as people feared and, in most cases, new technology has enhanced sales of existing products. A good example is children's books and TV. In some areas such as scientific publishing the Web is clearly an essential. In other areas it is an opportunity to increase sales. It is only a threat if you are paralysed by fear.

ATG: *The Nature site licence policy, when it was first implemented, was met with some resistance amongst the library community. Do you think that librarians were at all justified in their reaction? Now that the licence has been remodelled, is there a more positive feeling in the library community towards it?*

RC: The site licence industry has developed very quickly. If you think about it, the journal business has evolved over 50-100 years. Web delivery on any scale has come about in the last 2-3 years. So we are all experimenting and we all have to

adjust our systems in order to protect our business and continue to serve our customers. So yes, there was a negative response and so we reviewed and changed our policy. The response to the change has been overwhelmingly positive and we are bringing forward new customer service initiatives to ensure that we continue to adapt to customer needs.

ATG: *Will you ever make the full archive of Nature going back to 1869, available online?*

RC: We are currently evaluating the content and looking at the value we can add. We are keen to involve librarians in the process and would like to hear from any librarians who have opinions about this. They can share their ideas with Bianca Gerlinger: <b.gerlinger@macmillan.co.uk>.

ATG: *Over the past couple of years Macmillan has published a range of new journals under the Nature imprint. Have these publications been a success? Are any more planned?*

RC: The quality of Nature itself and the reliability and innovation of the editorial teams have encouraged us to create an extraordinarily high quality range of titles in more specialist disciplines such as neuroscience and immunology. These have all been remarkably successful and we have been able to keep prices reasonable whilst producing very high quality and heavily cited information. Our latest venture is the Nature Reviews series which is proving to be an indispensable road map service for scientists.

ATG: *There are some new initiatives that are advocating the idea of free scientific information on the Web whereby the author pays for publication rather than the end-user. What is your view of these initiatives?*

RC: The whole Public Library of Science debate has been complex and occasionally ill-tempered. We took the view that it was important enough for Nature to warrant dedicating an online debate to the subject. The debate itself is fascinating and we believe it has contributed to a greater understanding of the issues from the publishers, librarians and scientists' perspective. I recommend you visit: <http://www.nature.com/nature/debates/e-access/index.html>.

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Euromonitor International

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Euromonitor International has been a leading provider of global market intelligence for 27 years. With offices in London, Chicago and Singapore and a network of over 600 analysts in 60 countries worldwide, **Euromonitor** has access to global information sources. The company offers a complete range of global information resources, providing data across a vast range of countries and industries. Their products are available in different formats including print, CD-ROM, and Web access.

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Ed. Note: Watch future issues of The Charleston Adviser as these products may be reviewed. My thanks to Annette M. Budzisz, Press Executive, for supplying most of this information. —APM

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My own view is that where information is free there is no freedom of information.

ATG: Macmillan publishes a significant number of reference books through the Palgrave and Grove imprints. Will these titles always appear in print or do you think in some cases there may only be a Web version?

RC: I think the format of the product is less important than its content. Whether or not we publish in print as opposed to Web-only will be defined by the marketplace. If enough people want to buy it in print we'll publish; if not, we won't. My own hunch is that the book will be with us for many decades but that scholarly research (as opposed to general browsing) will move progressively towards the Web.

ATG: You brought out an electronic version of the Grove Dictionary of Art two years ago and electronic versions of the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians and the Grove Dictionary of Jazz this year. How do these new versions differ from their predecessors? Are you finding that libraries are buying either online or print or are they buying both?

RC: I think that we have managed to create the World's largest repository of information on art, music and culture. Through the electronic versions we have not only been able to add sophisticated search and other electronic functionality but also to extend the electronic content by, for instance, links to tens of thousands of works of art in museums and galleries. Libraries have been buying both products; they provide different needs for different people.

ATG: Are you working with any online aggregators? If so, which ones?

RC: We are working with **xrefer** (of which I also happen to be a director) **ProQuest**, **NetLibrary**, **eBrary** and **Questia**. It has been clear to us from the start that there is a business for us in working with these companies. What has not been clear is which is the best model and it is for this reason that we have been keen to

participate with a range of different services.

ATG: Pan Macmillan publishes the titles of many celebrity authors. Which authors have you found the most fascinating to meet? Are any of the titles available as e-books? Do you think e-books on hand-held devices will ever take off?

RC: One of the supposedly attractive things about working in trade publishing is the glamour. One of the best sellers we have published recently is *Bridget Jones Diary*. So last year **Renee Zellweger**, as part of her training for the starring role in the film, came to work undercover in our publicity department in order to learn how to speak with an English accent and to understand how British companies work. I was the only person who knew that she was in fact the Hollywood star, although quite a few people were surprised to see **Jim Carey** drop off the

new publicity assistant in a stretch limousine! I was then invited to take part in the party scene in the film, but the switchboard went and forgot to pass the message on – so Hollywood has been deprived of a new star and I am still awaiting the call.

I've never been convinced about eBooks for most general purposes. The physical aspects of a general book are as important – arguably more important – than the content and it will take many years before an electronic format will compensate for these physical qualities.

ATG: What, in your opinion, are the most exciting current publishing initiatives?

RC: Print-on-demand is the technology, more than any other, that will radically transform the business both by reducing the cost of holding stock but also by allowing production at the point of sale and hence eliminating the cost of freight.

ATG: Do you have any time for hobbies?

RC: I am currently attempting to build a cricket pitch in the deepest countryside of France where the geography, history or culture give me no encouragement at all. 🏏

